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History of the First Methodist Church
Given by Alma Lewis-James

In the fall of 1957 the Methodist Church suffered a catastrophe. With enthusiasm generated by a beautiful, newly decorated church, somebody cleaned out the cupboards in the Tower Room, and into the bonfire went the irreplaceable records of the church societies.

The only official data remaining are the two church brochures of 1887 and 1903, and the pastoral records, which were found to be incomplete.

It is for this sorry reason that the years of faithful, devoted service by individual members must go unrecorded now. These people made our church the living, vital thing it is today, and we are grateful to them.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Blade in making their files available; to Miss Fern Carter for invaluable material and assistance; and particularly to Mrs. Ruby Baily for her unfailing patience and memory, and her skill in answering questions.

Alma Lewis-James

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCHES

The village of Fairbury, Illinois, was surveyed November 10, 1857. During the following spring nineteen members of the Methodist Church moved there to live.

At first they held their meetings in their homes. Then, as their membership grew, they used the schoolhouse, and formally organized as a Methodist Society in July, 1858.

The following were the Charter Members: Dr. Lorenzo and Judith Beach, John Sr. and Rachel King, Catherine Kring, Mrs. Ann Delilah Kring, John Potter, Francis Moore, John Cumpston, Isaiah S. [illegible] and wife, Jacob Hunt and wife, A. J. Cropsey and wife, Randolph H. Maxwell and wife, Isam Moore and wife, and R. G. Crouch.

Their pastor was the Reverend W. J. Stubbles, who held the charge at the parent church of Avoca, and John Kring was appointed Class Leader, his lay assistant.

Immediately they began plans for the erection of a church, and two lots, 5 and 6, block 30, were bought of Caleb L. Patton, Octave Chenute and Andrew J. Cropsey, parties of the first part. The price was $50.00. The parties of the second part were the M. E. Trustees: Francis Moore, A. J. Cropsey, Lorenzo Beach, John Cumpston, John Kring, Richard G. Crouch, Sara Busse, Isam Moore and Garrison Bowen.

Largely through the efforts of Dr. Beach, the frame structure, 32 x 55 feet and costing $1,600.00, was completed and dedicated that same year. It was dedicated by the Reverend J. W. Flowers, the Presiding Elder.

That it prospered is evident in the account of Fairbury in general as printed in the Fairbury Intelligencer of August 10, 1865:

"The Methodist Church with Rev. J. G. Evans as pastor has, we learn, a membership of 150 and upwards, and a large congregation.
Their Sunday School, N. E. Lyman, superintendent, is said to be the finest in the country, having over two hundred scholars, and being conducted with ability and so as to make it interesting to all."

They were compelled to enlarge the church the following year, and this arrangement sufficed for another decade. When it, too, was outgrown, it was decided to build an entirely new one. This church was 45 x 75 feet and had a basement; and it was made of brick to resist the village fires which continually bedeviled Fairbury at that time.

They named it the Fairbury Centennial Methodist Episcopal Church, and the cornerstone was laid October 10, 1876, by the Presiding Elder, Reverend R. G. Pierce, and the Pastor, Reverend R. B. Williams.

Within the cornerstone they placed a list of the Board of Trustees: John Kring, Lorenzo Beach, W. K. Stafford, W. G. McDowell, O. P. McDowell, I. P. McDowell, James McDowell, S. G. Crull, and Wm. M. Dever.

The number of members was given as 160.

The stone also contained a card of the First National Bank; a Northwestern Christian Advocate (October 11, 1876); a copy of the Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean of the same date; a Livingston County Blade; a Fairbury Weekly Independent of October 13, 1876; a copy of the New Testament; and a 25¢ piece.

The auditorium of the new church was not quite complete at the end of the year, but the congregation assembled in the basement anyway. In honor of the occasion, one of the members, M. R. Stilwell, had cut letters from cardboard, which he gilded and strung into mottoes to bedeck the walls.

The Reverend R. G. Pierce dedicated the church, assisted by its pastor, Reverend R. B. Williams. This dedication, the paper said, was "followed by a remarkable revival

resulting in the conversion of about 300 persons, more than two-thirds of whom united with the Methodist church."

Just six months after this, a tornado roared across the town, blew the parsonage from its foundations and seriously damaged it, ripped off the church roof and leveled three of the walls. On the remaining wall was left a lone festoon: "In God We Trust."

It was a crushing blow. Dr. Beach had died, but Ben Walton was a member now. Through his energy, encouragement and generosity, a third church was built on the foundation of the ruined one, while the members held their services in Fairbury Hall.

This third church was dedicated January 20, 1878, by Reverend W. H. H. Adams, D.D., of Bloomington. They now had a membership of 280, and 200 children were enrolled in the Sunday School.

In 1880 another disaster befell them. All the church records were kept in the home of Judge Woodford McDowell, and when his house caught fire and burned to the ground, the records too were lost. The data were afterwards supplied from the memories of the surviving members, and so any discrepancies in some of the lists of members are easily understandable.

This cloud was only momentary. On May 13, 1882, the newspaper reported:

"The young ladies of the M. E. Society are to hold a Doll Fair, and a Strawberry and Ice Cream Festival at the Opera House. The funds will be given to the tower fund of the M. E. Church."

Three years later, while their mothers were busy with socials to raise funds to repair the parsonage, the girls were continuing their efforts. This time they wanted a new organ, and when it was installed it was generally agreed that it was "a real pipe organ, and the finest instrument of its kind ever shipped into the country."

In 1892, the old parsonage was abandoned, sold to Mrs. Mary Haverty for $221.00, and moved away, while a new and commodious parsonage was built on the old site.

During the winter of 1894 a blizzard caused severe damage when snow blew through the roof. Repairs followed, including a new roof, redecorating, and eventually installation of electric lighting.

By the turn of the century the membership had reached 542, and the church was again overcrowded. Plans were made for a new building.

On September 19, 1902, it was announced that a new church would be built at a cost of about $20,000.00. Construction proceeded through 1903, and the church was completed that year.

The stained glass windows were memorials to members of the church, including windows dedicated to Reverend J. A. Johnson and Mrs. Mary Frances Filley.

On November 15, 1903, the church held a Dedication Day and Grand Rally, with services throughout the day and evening.

LATER HISTORY

On September 21, 1906, the Methodists held a Jubilee Meeting, celebrating the full payment of all indebtedness. The church and parsonage improvements had cost $27,003.87, and the buildings were valued at $35,000.00.

By 1920, further remodeling included new carpets, lighting, refinishing woodwork, redecorating, and improvements to the basement.

Thirty years later, overcrowding again became a problem. Additional basement space was created, but conditions upstairs continued to worsen.

With membership reaching 630, a Centennial modernization program was begun. Extensive renovations were completed in the mid-1950s at a cost of about $40,000.00, with plans for a new educational building.

PASTORS OF THE FAIRBURY METHODIST CHURCH

[Pastor list preserved exactly as transcribed]

1857 — W. J. Stubbles
1858 — W. A. Presson
1859 — B. P. Wheet and E. H. Penfield
1860–1861 — J. Grundy
1862 — S. B. Baker
1863–1864 — J. G. Evans
1865 — J. E. Rutledge

1866–1868 — S. G. Havermale
1869–1870 — W. C. Knapp
1871–1872 — William Watson
1873 — R. G. Pearce
1874 — W. P. Graves
1875–1876 — R. B. Williams
1877 — John Wilkinson
1878–1879 — F. Havermale
1880 — B. W. Baker
1881–1882 — E. S. Wilson
1883 — J. W. Haney
1884 — R. Crewes

1885 — W. McPheeters
1886 — G. R. Palmer
1887–1888 — R. B. Williams
1889–1890 — Ed Wasmuth
1891–1893 — L. F. Cullom
1894–1898 — E. S. Wilson

1899–1900 — M. A. Head
1901–1906 — J. A. Johnson
1907–1909 — M. V. Crumbaker
1910–1912 — A. Wirt Lowther
1913 — Gideon L. Powell
1914–1916 — S. A. Chapman
1917–1920 — George Thorpe

1921–1924 — D. F. Wilson
1925–1928 — John V. Kennedy
1929–1933 — M. B. Van Lear
1934–1935 — Virgil Thompson
1936–1938 — R. E. Buford
1939–1940 — M. L. O'Harra
1941–1944 — L. R. Tagg
1945–1949 — C. L. Shult (died June 5, 1949)
1949–1954 — Cecil Lockard
1955 — William Jones

The Fairbury Methodist Church had 26 pastors during its first 46 years: 1857 to 1903. The longest service by one pastor was Reverend E. S. Wilson whose two terms covered 7 years and 4 months. He was transferred here from the West Virginia Conference.

"Brother Baker was taken sick on the way to his appointment from conference and died in Chenoa, November 13, 1862. His body was interred in the Fairbury cemetery, where a monument erected to his memory. Dr. Baker was the first man appointed to Fairbury after it became a separate charge or station.

Reverend M. L. O'Harra retired from here.

Reverend R. E. Buford has retired, and the Methodist congregation is most happy that he and Mrs. Buford have returned to Fairbury to make their home.

They first came to Fairbury from Sheldon, 1936, and went from here to the First Methodist Church at Pekin, in 1939.

During those three years, Reverend Buford took in 85 members, and it was during a period when no interest could be still feeling the effects of the Depression. Church contributions everywhere had suffered greatly. Nevertheless, under Reverend Buford's

guidance, the Fairbury church was one of three in the entire Illinois Conference that paid all its commitments in full each of the three Reverend Carroll Shult died while serving this charge at Fairbury. He was taken with a stroke while making a pastoral call and died three days later, June 5, 1949, aged 50 years.

He was born May 6, 1899, at Hillsdale, Illinois, the son of Reverend Grant Shult and Hettie Belle Aledough. He attended the Williamsfield High School and attended the Willamette College in Aledo; studied two years at Hed- ding College, Abingdon, Illinois; received his B. S. degree from Northwestern and his Doctor of Divinity from Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Illinois.

He married Miss Doris Pease of Burgess, Illinois, December 21, 1922, and became a member of the Central Illinois Conference in 1923. He came to Fairbury in 1945.

For several years he was secretary of the Committee on Ministerial Qualifications for the Illinois Conference, and at the time of his death he had been a member of the Conference Board of Education and was Director of Religious Education for the Bloomington District.

Surviving him are his wife; three sons, Ernest, Dale and Don; and three daughters, Mrs. Earl Hancock, of Northbrook; Mrs. Charles L. Jackson, of Kalamazoo, Michigan; and Mrs. Tom Carter, of Fairbury.

EARLY ORGANIZATION AND REVIVALS

The Fairbury church remained an appointment and part of the Avoca Circuit until 1863 when it was made a separate charge.

There have been four different charges or conference appointments in this section:

Fairbury Circuit, 1862 to 1875.
Fairbury Circuit, North, 1866.
Fairbury Circuit, South, 1866.
Fairbury Station, 1863.

All these appointments were closely related to Methodism in Fairbury and vicinity.

Between the services conducted by the circuit riders preacher, the congregation for convenience was divided into neighborhood Class Leaders, who conducted the worship service in the absence of the pastor.

There were nine Class Leaders in the circuit. John M. McDowell taught one class at the Avoca church and Robert Chambers the second. John Kring taught the first class at the Fairbury church, and Jacob Hunt the second. Francis Moore was a farmer at Grum and taught a class at the Tanner Schoolhouse. Robert Moore at his schoolhouse, Dr. Crum at

the Fairbury Review Schoolhouse and Grace Wilson at McKeown's Schoolhouse. This latter was cut off to the Chenoa Circuit.

These classes were all united in the Avoca Circuit and the Circuit in turn belonged to a District presided over by the Presiding Elder.

In the early days of the Fairbury church, the Presiding Elders were not selected because of his executive work, but for his spiritual mindedness, preaching ability and evangelistic zeal.

It was his duty to preside over the Quarterly Meeting. This meeting, which included the entire Circuit, was held in the various member churches and lasted for several days.

It was felt that it was hard for a Methodist to "backslide" when he had the privileges of an old fashioned Quarterly Meeting four times a year.

Their Love Feasts, in the early days of the Methodist Church, were testimonial meetings to which only the loyal, faithful members of the church were invited. Bread and water were passed in commemoration of their Common Brotherhood. After the Love Feast was the preaching, followed by Communion.

At the time of the Fairbury church, it had come to mean a short testimonial meeting after the regular sermon. It never lasted more than fifteen minutes. They gave the favorite Bible verses and suggestions for the church.

Revival Meetings were frequent and Protracted Meetings were held by every Methodist preacher at every preaching place in the Circuit, usually in the winter, when the attention of the congregation was undivided, and they lasted two weeks or longer if the interest required. Intended primarily for the conversion of sinners, the Revivals also included "the Mourners" and refreshing.

A Basket Meeting: one that they took their dinners with them in a basket.

With the turn of the century the revivals began to lose their momentum. In 1905, during February, the Methodists had a month's revival meetings under the leadership of the noted evangelists Harry and Maggie, and in 1914 they joined with the other Protestant Churches to bring the Honeywell revival team to Fairbury. A large tabernacle was built on the site of the old Thomas House, complete with sawdust in the aisles and one of the outstanding attractions of the services was the great choir composed of members from the local churches.

Dr. Honeywell was up to the minute in his approach to his audience, and he believed in letting people know he was in town. One day during the services there was a parade down Main Street of small boys dressed to represent the various nations, and each carried a placard to advertise the revival services.

One minor outcome of these Union Revival services was the church series baseball games the following summer. The boys teams from the Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and Christian churches played some nine games which were enthusiastically attended.

Every community developed during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods had its full share of rowdies. The point of difference with Fairbury was that it was the more richly endowed.

Every preacher expected this turbulence during his sermons that stretched for hours. Bean-shooters and window-pane rapping were merely commonplace. Revival services, anywhere, received the ardent attentions of young drunkards. Stones and clubs were flung through the open windows in summer and red pepper (a very effective form of tear gas) was poured on the tops of heating stoves in winter. Frequently the services were broken up with just plain noise.

To be a successful preacher, one needed a quick wit and a strong arm.

Fairbury, however, was known far and wide for its young hooligans who lurked in the dark alleys and struck down unsuspecting pedestrians from behind. Ministers of the cloth, intent upon their Quarterly Meetings, were not exempt.

At first a convenient length of hose was used to stun the victim, but soon a more efficient weapon was developed. It became known as the “stuffed club,” and it was widely used in Fairbury among the theatre crowds and Saturday night shoppers. The victims were so numerous that when a club was finally captured and put on exhibition at the Blade office, it drew crowds eager to inspect it.

It proved to be a canvas sack, six inches in diameter and twelve inches long. It was tightly stuffed with excelsior and coarse salt, and this was tied to a stick two feet long. As a weapon, it had range, weight and flexibility, and quite easily knocked a man unconscious.

Anyone attending Quarterly Conference in Fairbury learned to be unusually wary.

A few well placed arrests finally put a stop to the “stuffed clubs,” and in 1890 the exasperated villagers gathered the rest of the trouble with an Ordinance providing a $25.00 fine for anyone maliciously disturbing any church service.

SOCIALS

Now the early Methodists stood strongly against every variety of dancing and card playing. Instead, every effort was made to provide harmless entertainment for both children and adults.

The most popular form of this was the “Socials.” They were held about once a month, usually in the homes of the church members, and they speedily became a polite type of social warfare.

The beginnings were simple. For instance, there was the “Carpet Ball Social,” which was popular in the 1870’s. Every lady brought a ball of carpet rags which were discarded pieces of cloth torn into strips and then sewed together for the weaving of the ever popular rag rugs. In the care of her ball, the lady put her name. During the evening all the balls were auctioned off to the gentlemen, who unwound them to discover their partners and escort them into a supper of oysters, hot coffee and cake.

The socials became a gauge of social standing, and in order for the Blade to report that the elegant parlors were crowded, something unique to intrigue the interest of the fickle public was necessary.

Mrs. McDowell held an “Avoirdupois Social,” the John Virgins a “Peanut Tea.” The invitations for the latter were sent out in peanut shells tied with ribbons.

The Davy Sharps held a “Pink Tea.” There were hammocks under the trees for this one, and the lawn was bright with torchlights. The meetings of the class, intent upon their Quarterly Meetings, were evident with the elaborate letters cut from pink cardboard and carefully inserted into each dish of ice cream.

A torch, it should be explained, was a covered iron cup with a wick in it, and it held whale oil.

At socials and lawn parties, a torch was tied to a stick of the desired length and stuck in the ground for illumination.

They had Pie Socials and Oyster Suppers.

In Fairbury oysters came in cans and were popular both fried and in stew. Occasionally at a “rare” or “cheap” fair, a prankster would slip in a rubber oyster to disconcert the fastidious.

Dominys gave for Socials and the men this was advised beforehand because it was for the benefit of the parsonage fund.

“Corn hulled with milk,
Corn, mush with milk.”
Corn bread
Corn starch cake
Corned beef
Corn starch blanc mange
Corn popped
Sweet corn

Coffee

The Epworth League likewise raised money with a “Lemon Squeeze” held at Maple’s Hall.

“Menu
Lemonade — Lemon wafers
Potatoes Hotel de Maitre
Lemon Charlotte Russe
Lemon Jelly
Lemon Caramel cake – Lemon Pie
Lemon Jelly Cake — Meats
Celery — Pickles — Slaw
Lemon ice — 10 cents extra
A program will be given”

In season, the strawberry and ice cream socials were tremendously popular. Sometimes these were homemade festivals, and were held at the Opera House. The little tables for those taking refreshments were set in the middle of the floor, and they were waited upon by the prettiest girls wearing the prettiest aprons. The space around the walls was reserved for the Promenaders, who walked elegantly to and fro and conversed with their friends.

For the “Pound Social,” the friends called before the hosts or hostess to bring a pound of sugar, meat, butter, beans, dried fruits, canned fruits, crackers, soap, starch, dry goods, and even money. Such donations were used to help an impoverished family or their own underpaid minister.

By 1905, however, all this procession of socials for raising money for church purposes had demoralized the congregation. The women were exhausted with the housecleaning and cooking involved, and the men’s stomachs could endure no more.

In September, a Conference of Laity of Central Illinois Methodist Episcopal Conference resolutions were adopted recommending church socials for evenings in favor of good plain living.

THE OLD FOLKS DINNERS

The pioneer settlers of the vicinity were always eager for reunions and they early formed an Old Settlers Society. Anyone who had lived here 15 years or more was eligible for membership.

The Fairbury Fair featured a special day for them, complete with a log cabin for their special enjoyment, and for some years the Methodist Old Folks Dinners were major social events.

There was a bond of affection among the early settlers that is completely incomprehensible today. The loneliness they had endured together, the homesickness, the bitter days they had struggled with raw nature to make a simple living, created a community of feeling that endured until death.

Together they had put up each other's houses and barns, together they had helped each other in the fields and homes. Together they assisted at the births, celebrated the weddings, and buried the sick, but they died there.

When death occurred to a Methodist member, it was a team from the church who came to wash and dress the corpse for burial, and from them the team was composed of men; for a Sister of women's assistance was still in the distance in 1910.

For the survivors, the church members cared for livestock and crops, attended to the households, and adopted the orphans into their own families.

One of the most successful Old Folks Dinners was given August 28, 1904, when the church, the Epworth League, under the supervision of the Mercy and Help department, entertained the old members of the church and congregation, to the number of about sixty persons. The special guests of the day were fifty-four men and women whose combined ages amounted to the astonishing number of three thousand, nine hundred and twenty-nine years. The average age was found to be but a slight fraction below seventy-three years. It was indeed a notable gathering of the Old Saints of Fairbury.

Only about two-thirds of these venerable people were able to attend, because of sickness or the infirmities of age.

About ten o'clock in the morning, they were brought to the church in carriages provided by the Ladies' Aid, and the morning hour till noon were spent in social converse and visiting. They were busy refreshing each other's memories of the great events and happenings of thirty, forty and fifty years ago. At noon, they were invited to repair to the parlors of the church, where the young people of the church had prepared for them a splendid chicken dinner, with all the usual accompaniments, with ice cream and cake for dessert.

After dinner they looked through the new church and resumed their visiting. At two o'clock they were seated in the auditorium, and were entertained for a short while by Miss Olive McKee and Miss Fern Swarm. This was followed by the old people singing some of the old hymns of the church, a short address by the pastor, and closing with an old-fashioned class-meeting in which many of them took part. At four o'clock their pictures were taken in front of the church, after which they were taken to their homes in carriages. Thus closed a notable and most enjoyable day for the old people.

The young people of the Methodist church are to be commended for these thoughtful and kindly ministrations. Our old people deserve it all. Our hands clasp.

The following are the names of those present: Mrs. David Sharp, Mrs. Swazze, Mrs. Susan Baker, Mrs. Matilda Veatch, Mrs. Rauch, Mrs. Ellen Catton, Mrs. Nancy Town, Mrs. M. E. Davis, Mrs. J. Bove, Mrs. Jane Townsend, Mrs. H. H. Gravina, Mrs. Matheny, Mrs. F. S. Wilson, Mrs. Geo. Goshoru, Mrs. T. A. Beach, Mrs. Cilla Mrs. W. H. Taylor, Mrs. Jane Dawson, Mrs. M. C. Crouch, Mrs. Hariet Hilton, Mrs. C. Powell, Mrs. David Wright, Mrs. M. J. Carman, Mrs. J. Kring, Mrs. E. J. Hurdley, Mrs. C. R. Sims, Mrs. Lucinda Williams, Mrs. Platt, Mrs. J. Moore, Mrs. H. A. Baylor, Mrs. J. W. Harold, Mrs. S. R. Crull, Mrs. M. Rose, Mrs. Canna Pool, Mrs. M. D. Street, Mrs. Geo. Kilbury, Mrs. Henry Webster and Mrs. Lucinda Cook, Messrs. T. A. Beach, James Kirby, David Sharp, J. Kring, T. S. Rariden, C. B. Ostrander, J. Lowe, A. Filley, J. B. Lawrence, E. Marsh, H. C. Ravenecroft, Geo. Goshorn, T. C. Davis, S. Dancy, Hugh McKee and A. R. Matheny.

THE METHODIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Less than a year after the Methodist Society of Fairbury was founded, they established a Sunday School. Mr. N. E. Lyman was the Superintendent, and the program was an immediate and outstanding success.

The other churches of the town started Sunday Schools too, and since their hours of services varied, one enterprising group of Methodist girls discovered it was possible to attend all three. They thus alleviated, in no small way, the boredom of the Blue Sundays observed at that time.

First, the girls went to the Baptist Sunday School, and then came back over to the Methodist church for the preaching service. At twelve o'clock they walked over to the Presbyterian Sunday School after which they went home to dinner. At two o'clock, when the Methodist Sunday School convened, and the girls were there in time.

Preaching services were at "The First Presbyterian Church." These services increased to this schedule: 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Class Meeting was 12.

Sunday School — 2:30 p.m.

Prayer Meeting was Wednesday evening.

Young People's Meeting was one time 7:30 p.m.

Women's Foreign Missionary Society — 2:30 p.m. the last Thursday of the month.

Choir, Thursday evening.

Not long after the erection of their new church, the Sunday School became the source of incredible and painful embarrassment. Over a period of years Sunday School outsiders

had watched in silent horror as concerts were presented to packed audiences. The first Mrs. Ida Bower, an accomplished musician, drilled the children, and led them in the performance of songs, recitations, essays and dialogues.

In the summer time the usual Sunday School picnics and took the children out to nearby woods on hay racks. July 14, 1885, "several hundred children went to Taylor's Grove where they had swings and croquet sets. They took their own dinners, but had free lemonade. The Juvenile band furnished the music.

During the winter there was the excitement of the Christmas Entertainments. In 1878 the Blade carried an announcement: "The Christmas service at the M. E. Church will consist of 'Christmas Chimes', and a tree with presents for the children. Parents will be expected to furnish presents for their own children, as far as possible. Everybody is invited to use the tree as a medium to make presents to their friends. A competent committee will have charge of all articles left with them."

(Their Christmas tree, of course, was lit by little wax candles and hung with popcorn strings and cookies.)

In 1881, at their Christmas Exercises, there was "a huge elephant drawing a handsomely decorated passenger car that came from behind a curtain. Santa was on top of the car holding the lines driving the elephant. Inside the car were fifteen little girls in white with blue sashes and gold cornets. On the breast of each was a gold letter spelling Merry Christmas. They sang carols and distributed gifts."
The program of 1887, however, might have been a tragedy. "The Christmas doings at the various churches were very successfully carried out, with the exception of a slight mishap at the M. E. This edifice was well filled, and the presents handsomely arranged on a structure representing a cabin, this latter being covered with cotton in representation of snow. After the exercises, and during the distribution of presents, the cotton unfortunately took fire from a burning taper and in an instant the entire structure was enveloped in flames. Prompt action, however, saved the presents, and prevented any serious damage to the church. Several window lights were broken, and, of course, the carpets and furniture were somewhat soiled. The occupants of the church, as soon as the fire started, made a rush to get out, which was accomplished without anyone sustaining serious injury."

In 1893 the Methodist program "drew an enormous crowd." Logan Kring was St. Nick, and Lilly Churchill presided at the organ.

Eighteen ninety-nine found them still filled with patriotism from the Spanish-American War. Admission was to be ten cents. "A beautiful battleship will be one of the novel features of the entertainment. It will sail into the audience loaded with luxuries for the little ones."

For year around interest, they maintained a thriving lending library for the children. (This was before the Dominy Memorial Library was presented to the town.) A Book Social held at Maple's Opera House cleared $21.00 for new books.

Later — about the time of the First World War — they had a rousing Sunday School Orchestra. Logan Kring, who played the trombone in it, was the leader.

Only a few lists of Sunday School officers are available now, but in 1899 the Superintendent was Mr. I. H. Shover.

Assistant Superintendent, Mrs. H. I. Reynolds; Secretary, Dora Thornton; Treasurer, Nellie Goshorn; Organist, Fred Bethard; Chorister, C. W. Neitz; Librarians, Josie Patton and Mrs. Zella Baker; and Class Librarians, Bessie Bethard and Edith Mitten.

In 1894 the Superintendent was Mr. W. W. Wonser.

Assistant Superintendent, Mrs. G. C. Lewis; Secretary, Ida Crull; Treasurer, Edna Ross; Librarians, Vinna Earnheart, Jessie Blakesley, Carrie Harn; Chorister, Logan Kring; Assistant Chorister, Orra Phillips; Organist, Lura Kirby; Assistant Organist, Deane Earnheart; Artist, Pearl Moats; Assistant Artist, Henry Schwab.

Other Sunday School Superintendents have been Mrs. Logan Kring, Mrs. Harry Reynolds, Henry Schade, Grey Scott, and Roy Melvin.

I. H. Shover served in 1903; Andrew Steidinger, 1940; Keith Anderson, 1942; Mrs. Debold Householder, 1945-1950; Wayne Newnam, 1951-1957.

Sunday School Teachers

The Sunday School teachers in 1887 were Fannie Stafford, Hannah F. Skinner, Maggie Evans, Sarah Walton, Ida F. Patton, Isaac Kerr, Lillie McDowell, Jessie Doming, Lizzie Carman, Mary Young, Mary E. Westervelt, G. B. Gordon, C. W. Neitz, Prof. J. E. Bangs, H. H. Stafford, Miss Margaret Maloney, Jennie Dominy.

In 1903 they were Rev. J. A. Johnson, Mrs. J. A. Johnson, Lloyd Dancey, Mrs. I. O. McCullough, Logan Kring, Ida Adams, Charles W. Neitz, J. G. Francis, Edna Clift, Charles Swarm, Mary Bennett, Viola Payne, Ed E. Meharry, Prof. W. S. Perry, Myrtle Stafford, D. W. Barnes, George Day, Dora Thornton, Mrs. Charles Swarm.

The Divisional Superintendents of the 1957 Sunday School are: Pre-School through Grade 3, Mrs. Harvey Day; Grades 4 through 6, Mrs. Robert Maurer; Grades 7 through 8, Mrs. Tom Carter; Youth Division, John McNeil; Adult Division, Miss Dorothy Rudd.

Presidents of the Board of Trustees

The Presidents of the Board of Trustees were I. P. McDowell, 1887; John Will McDowell, 1903; J. [missing word in newspaper] 1940-1948; Phil Hotaling, 1950-1951; Clifford Denker, 1957.

THE CHOIR

Always, one of the highlights of the Methodist preaching services was the music by their choir. In 1887 the members were Edna Barnes, Ora Phillips, Nettie Lough, Ida Mahoney, Lura Houseworth, William Skinner, Harry Amsbary and L. J. Pfaat. Charlie Neitz was the leader, and Mabel Rogers the organist.

Logan Kring was a faithful member of the choir for 52 years until his failing eyesight compelled him to give it up.

From the early days of the Fairbury church the Methodist children have been organized into a choir of their own, and this program has grown into the present four groups.

The Cherubs (boys and girls of the first four grades of school) number 33.

The Seraphs are 28 girls in grades 5 to 8.

The Choristers are 16 boys in grades 5 to 8.

The Chapel Singers are 13 High School boys and girls.

In addition to these are the Wesleyana Singers (13 women's voices only) and the Chancel Choir (composed of 20 mixed voices.)

Each choir practices weekly and the directors include 6 volunteers and one paid director. The practice sessions of the younger children have become especially popular because of the suppers served them afterwards by the members of the Wesleyana Circle.

The church is exceptionally fortunate in its accomplished and talented Music Committee: Mrs. E. F. Dickey, Mrs. Curtis Weeks, Mrs. Logan Wilson, Mrs. Everett Sutter, Mrs. Harley Bedell, Mrs. Keith Anderson, Mrs. Charles Veatch, Jr., Mrs. James Goold, and Stanley Weeks.

THE PASTOR'S AID SOCIETY

"The members of the church met Feb. 20, 1887, following a previous notice for the purpose of forming a society in the interest of the M. E. Church."

Reverend Palmer, pastor, called the meeting to order and read the constitution, by-laws and pledge that had been written. They were adopted as read. The name of the Society was to be known as the Pastor's Aid Society, and the following officers were elected:

President—Mrs. J. R. Stillwell.
Vice President—Mrs. J. W. Walton.
Secretary—Mrs. H. H. Stafford.

Treasurer—Mrs. H. J. Ramsey. There were managers and assistants appointed for each quarter of the town to call on members and new-comers and take care of any work to be done. Various entertainments, dinners, teas and socials were given to raise money. On Dec. 28, 1909, the ladies gave $500.00 to the pipe organ fund. The organ was purchased and installed in 1910.

It was dedicated that same year with an organ recital by a town.

The Pastor's Aid Society became a committee from the W.S.C.S. to assist with the pastoral calls, and three of their members were appointed from each quarter of town. This committee has fallen into disuse.

THE LADIES AID

In 1903 the Ladies Aid had the following officers:

President—Mrs. H. J. Ramsey
Vice President—Mrs. T. S. O. McDowell
Secretary—Mrs. Pearl Hawk
Treasurer—Mrs. J. P. Mitten

Other presidents were Mrs. Dora Bennett, Mrs. Lottie Householder, and Mrs. Edith Steidinger, 1938-39. Mrs. Sue Lange held office in 1939-40.

THE WOMEN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The Women's Foreign Missionary Society was organized shortly before 1887. It is listed in the brochure of that date as meeting the last Thursday of each month at 2:30 p.m.

Their minutes book of 1899 gives the following officers:

President—Mrs. Samuel Dancey
First Vice President—Mrs. E. S. Wilson
Second Vice President—Mrs. L. B. Dominy
Recording Secretary—Mrs. C. E. Patmore
Corresponding secretary—Mrs. Carter

Treasurer—Mrs. H. A. Presler
Mite Box Superintendents—Mrs. James Carter, Mrs. Wright.

The next April their book contained a notation: “The Society forgot to have any meeting at all—too busy about housecleaning.”

The 1903 officers were:

President—Mrs. J. A. Johnson
Vice President—Mrs. E. S. Wilson, Mrs. James Kirby, Mrs. F. M. Patton.

Recording secretary—Mrs. C. E. Patmore

Corresponding secretary—Mrs. Isaac Walton
Mite Box Secretaries—Mrs. G. C. Lewis, Mrs. George Day
Treasurer—Mrs. A. L. McKee

Mrs. G. C. Lewis was the president of the local society for a number of years, and she was also the W. F. M. S. president of the Kankakee District.

It was through her and her husband, Dr. G. C. Lewis, that the society supported two medical missionaries. The first was Miss Eva A. Gregg, R. N., who became a personal friend of the Lewis family. She went to China in 1912, and for many years she was superintendent of the Isabella Fisher Hospital in Tientsin. By her efforts the Ella Home was built for the nurses, so named in honor of Ella Gregg, her mother, and Ella Lewis.

The second medical missionary was Dr. Alexander Kemp. He and his wife were sent to Quessua, Angola, Africa, in 1923. Under his care was a hospital and clinic, a school for girls, and a boys’ school which had both agricultural and industrial departments.

The special pride of the Society, however, was their very own Missionary, Fern Carter, who went to India. Her grandmother, Mrs. James Carter, and her mother, Mrs. Mollie Carter, both were faithful, devoted workers in the Society for many years. The latter served as president.

Fern was born on a farm near Wing, Illinois, March 4, 1900, the oldest of three children, a brother and sister. In 1903 the family moved to a 320 acre farm south of Thawville, attending the church and Sunday School there, and she joined the church there when 13 years old.

She attended the Veatch school, District 197, Iroquois County, until the 8th grade when the family moved to Fairbury. She graduated from the Fairbury High School in 1918; attended Illinois State Normal University for two summers; graduated from the University of Illinois in 1925 with a B. A. degree; and attended the Chicago Theological

Seminary in 1934. Following this, she taught her sister Ann's school while she went to college.

In January, 1928, Fern sailed for India, going by way of England. She was the manager of the Boarding Department of the girls' school there, which had 200 pupils from the first grade through high school. Fern taught in the high school, and was the adviser for the local Women's Missionary and Temperance Society, and the Epworth League.

Returning to the States in March 1933, she went back again to India in 1934. This time she was appointed to the District Evangelistic and Educational Work at Nadiad, India, but she had served only a little over a year when she was stricken with polio.

Since that time Fern has devoted her efforts to the Fairbury church, and her wheel chair has become a center dynamo of saintly power. She is beloved and cherished by everyone of the congregation.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETIES

There was a Young People's Missionary Society, of course, for both boys and girls. Clarence Dexter was President; Roy Robinson, secretary; and Bertha Chapman, Treasurer. Later, after the boys had lost all interest, the girls' societies of Standard Bearers, and the juniors King's Heralds were organized and throve enthusiastically.

THE WOMEN'S HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The Women's Home Missionary Society devoted its efforts to the Cunningham Home, a children's institution at Urbana, Illinois, and the Langleyville Settlement House at Langleyville, Illinois.

It was a large organization, and the attendance averaged 75 to 80 at every meeting. Some of the presidents were Mrs. Charles Day, Mrs. Jessie Love, Mrs. Melvin Anderson, Mrs. O. L. Veatch, Mrs. Ralph Deputy, and Mrs. Will Henning. Mrs. Elmer Baily was the last of their presidents before the reorganization. She took office in 1935.

They also had an associate society for children, the Mission Band. In 1903 Eva Barnes was President; Mamie Westervelt and Erma Neitz, Vice Presidents; Lillian Hassenfratz, Secretary; Lawrence Wilson, Treasurer. Later this became the Queen Esthers (Maxine Lange was the 1940 President) and the Mothers Jewels for the younger children.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE

In 1940 the entire Methodist church reorganized the groups within it. The Ladies Aid, the Pastors' Guild, the Women's Home Missionary Society, and the Women's Foreign Missionary Society united to form the Women's Society of Christian Service. Mrs. Jessie Love was the first President of the new organization taking office in 1940 and serving four years. Mrs. Walter Henning and Mrs. Harry Newnam also served four years each, successively; Mrs. Lester Pearson in 1951; Mrs. E. M. Gerdes, 1953; Mrs. Hugh Vansickle, 1956; and Mrs. Edgar Runyon, 1957.

They have ninety-four members, with an average attendance of thirty.

WESLEYANA CIRCLE

The Wesleyana Circle is a junior branch of the W. S. C. S., composed of young mothers and working girls who are unable to attend afternoon meetings.

They organized in 1950 with 33 members and have now grown to 60 meeting the third Monday of the month in the homes of the members.

They sponsor the annual Mother and Daughter Banquets given near Mother's Day; help with the annual Chicken Pie Supper; and furnish the help for one day a month at the Hospital Snack Bar. With the money they have made they have bought various things for the church kitchen, such as the stainless steel ware, punch bowl and cups, and films for the Sunday School.

Their chairmen have been: Betty Ficklin, 1950; Helen Streib, 1951; Marie Wessels, 1952; Eula Mae Veatch, 1953; Melba Wilson, 1954; Dolorous Steidinger, 1955; Arends, 1956; Jan McNeil, 1957.

THE MEN'S BROTHERHOOD

A class of Methodist men met together as the Men's Brotherhood in 1940, with Phil Hotaling as their president. It has grown into what is now a chartered group of 35 members. They are known as the Methodist Men and meet regularly. Hartzell Horine was their president in 1951, and Lloyd Woodward has that office now.

THE METHODIST YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

From the very founding of the town, Literary Societies were extremely popular in Fairbury. Their members took themselves seriously in their search for culture, and so it was no astonishing thing that the Methodist boys and girls formed a Literary Society, too.

All of the members were about sixteen years old, and they met at the various homes.

Sometimes for their programs they gave “Dialogues”, or one-act plays, and one of these performances took place at the Filley residence. The dining room was used as the stage, the kitchen was the dressing room, and their parents were jam-packed into the sitting room and parlor. Charlie Neitz led the singing, and then they gave their play.

From this literary Society, the Epworth League was organized in 1890. The members met at the church at 7 o’clock every Sunday evening. Charlie Neitz was the first President, an office he held for over four years.

By 1896 they had 150 members, and were reported to be in a flourishing condition. They gave frequent socials for various projects, one of which was a benefit for the Cubans.

In 1903 the officers were as follows:
President—Ira McCullough

First Vice President—C. W. Neitz.

Second Vice President—Ida Adams

Third Vice President—Jennie Clift.

Fourth Vice President—Elizabeth Neff

Secretary—Charles Steinberg.
Treasurer—U. S. Swarm

May 5, 1909, the following officers were elected:
President—Charles Steinberg.
First Vice President, Miss Mayme Westervelt.
Second Vice President, Charles Maunder.
Third Vice President, Miss Greta Shover.
Fourth Vice President, Miss Edith Mitten
Secretary—Harry Branvig
Treasurer, Logan Kring.
Organist, Miss Mary Crumbaker
Assistant Organist, Miss Fern Morton.
Chorister, Logan Kring.

The last President of the Epworth League was Hugh Henning, 1940.

A Junior Epworth League, which met at 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, provided similar worship for slightly younger group of children. In 1903 their officers were as follows:
Superintendent, Mrs. W. S. Perry
President, Gertrude Shook
First Vice President, Eva Barnes.

Second Vice President, Anna Ginther.

Third Vice President, Mayme Westervelt.

Fourth Vice President, Leona James.

Secretary, Bethel Zook
Treasurer, Lawrence Wilson
Librarian, Lillian Hassenfratz.
Organist, Lucretia Mitten.
Chorister, Erma Neitz.

About 1942 the Methodist Youth Fellowship was organized from the League members, with Bette Newmann as the first president; 1945—Marilyn Steidinger; 1947—Joan Kelson; 1951—Robert Cummins, Jr. The present president is Carol Melvin.

The Youth Fellowship, with an average attendance of 18, meets every Wednesday evening. Mr. Willis Shay is their Counselor.

Images

This long article had quite a few images. ChatGPT was used to repair and/or colorize these images. The images will be displayed below.

Methodist Church Epworth League Mission Study class of 1902 is, left to right, back row, Charles Steinberg, Bertha Ward, Charlie Sutton, Charlie Neitz, Milt Kelley, Edith Kilbury and Alec Powell.

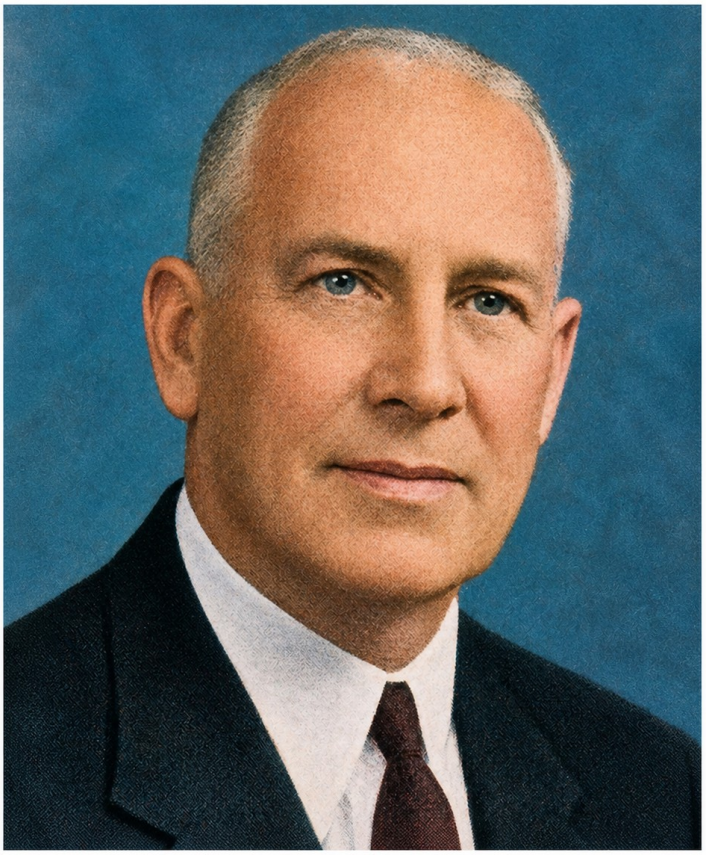
In the front are Greta Shover Stewart, Rev. Johnson, Jennie Dancey Walker, Earl Bailey, Hazel Sheppard Brown.

A 1938 Methodist Sunday School Class is shown above. From left to right they are Mary Eleanor Combes Woodruff, the teacher; Barbara Weeks Traub, Lyle Wessels, Dean Moser, Harley Wagenseller and Richard Mowry.

Second Methodist Church building, constructed in 1876, was leveled by tornado.

NOTE: The building behind the damaged church is the wood frame school building built in 1860. It was replaced in 1895 by the brick South Side school, later renamed Isaac Walton school.

Rev. C. L. Shult was pastor ol the First Methodist Church from 1945 to 1949, when he suffered a stroke while visiting a member of his congregation and died three days later, on June 5.



The Rev. R. E. Buford.

Charles Neitz

Rev. Wirt Lowther,
pastor 1910—1912.

MISC TRANSCRIPTION NOTES

This April 3, 1958, Centennial edition of the Blade was a massive publication compared to the usual volume of the weekly paper. It was probably a challenge to accept articles from many people, then fix them and then set the type correctly.

This long article has several errors including missing words or wrong punctuation. For the most part, these errors were left in place. The transcription retains the original spelling and grammar except where noted.

Dale C. Maley

Fairbury IL Historian

May 5, 2026